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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine whether proofreading a text aloud was more effective than silent proofreading in helping Black English Vernacular (BEV) speaking students to locate and correct dialect features in writing. The study was divided into two parts. In the first part, 29 11th grade BEV-speakers edited three teacher-produced texts, one through silent proofreading, another by oral proofreading, and a third by listening to the teacher read the text aloud. In the second part of the study, 12 of the 29 subjects proofread excerpts from their own writing using both an oral and a silent proofreading strategy. When controlling for order and repetition eifects, means of the number of errors located and corrected for the different types of proofreading were substantially the same. The results indicate that oral proofreading is not more effective than silent proofreading as an editing strategy. The findings suggest that while different proofreading strategies do help BEV-speaking students to find some of the errors in their own writing, all such strategies were of marginal effectiveness--fewer than 20% of student-produced errors were detected. One conclusion to be drawn from this may be that results of such activities do not warrant large investments of class time for this practice. (Two tables of data are included; 18 references are attached.) (Author)

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Detecting and Correcting BEV Features in Writing through Silent and Oral Proofreading

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Running head: ORAL AND SILENT PROOFREADING FOR BEV ERRORS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether proofreading a text aloud was more effective than silent proofreading in helping Black English Vernacular (BEV) speaking students to locate and correct dialect features in writing. The study was divided into two parts. In the first part, 29 eleventh grade BEV-speakers edited three teacher-produced texts, one through silent proofreading, another by oral proofreading, and a third by listening to the teacher read the text aloud. In the second part of the study, 12 of the 29 subjects proofread excerpts from their own writing using both an oral and a silent proofreading strategy. When controlling for order and repetition effects, means of the number of errors located and corrected for the different types of proofreading were substantially the same. The results indicate that oral proofreading is not more effective than silent proofreading as an editing strategy. The findings suggest that while different proofreading strategies do help BEV-speaking students to find some of the errors in their own writing, all such strategies were of marginal effectiveness---fewer than 20% of student-produced errors were detected. One conclusion to be drawn from this may be that results of such activities do not warrant large investments of class time for this practice.

Detecting and Correcting BEV Features

in Writing through Oral and Silent Proofreading

Composition teachers for speakers of non-standard English face a dilemma in their classrooms. Many, myself included, recognize that no dialect of English is inherently superior to others, and we try to project a respectful attitude toward our students' speech patterns. When teaching students how to write, we accept the notion that writing is about communicating ideas and that our student-writers need to be primarily concerned with the content, organization, and logic of those ideas. We recognize writing is not simply an exercise in error avoidance. Students are not taught to ignore their errors and to disregard the conventions of standard written English, but to focus initially on the message of their texts. We have accepted current theories about teaching writing to BEV-speaking students whereby we do not denigrate our students' dialects and we focus more on the content than on the grammar of their writing (Epps, 1985; Lipscomb, 1985; Ramsey, 1985; Britto, 1983). Since a preoccupation with correctness might impede students' fluency as they generate ideas and organize them logically, a process model of writing instruction that makes editing a final stage in the production of a text is a sensible strategy.

After taking a piece of their writing through the entire writing process, many of our students produce texts whose content is interesting, whose organization is intelligent, and whose logic is irrefutable. Through such writing, our students show that they have learned the most important lessons of the composition class; that is, good writers produce good writing by controlling the content, organization, and logic of their ideas, yet those very same interesting, organized, and logical compositions can fill us, perhaps hypocritically, with frustration. When students produce texts that are not free from error, we become frustrated; the stronger and more well-developed the ideas, the greater the frustration. In spite of our good intentions, we

know that the standard English-speaking world which will receive our students is far less tolerant of dialect than we are. Mainstream America discriminates against dialect-speakers (Britto, 1983; Linn, 1975). One ill-constructed past participle or one missing copula or one misplaced "-s" could blind a reader to the message of our students' words. We know how college professors and personnel directors and scholarship committees will scrutinize our students' writing. As a result, we know that our students must learn to compose error-free texts if they are to have success in the standard English-speaking world.

According to many researchers (Lotto, 1989; Reynoso, 1987; Farr & Janda, 1985, Collins, 1979; Olson, 1977), the use of BEV features in students' writing is the manifestation of a larger problem that affects both BEV speakers and non-BEV speakers alike; that is, such students are overly dependent on oral discourse style, even in their writing, because they lack familiarity with a literate style of discourse. As a result, Bartholomae (1980) suggests that the analogy that links developmental composition instruction with second language learning can be a useful one if the mode of learning is writing rather than speaking. As such, Krashen's (1988, 1983) theories of second language acquisition become applicable to the writing program for BEV-speakers as well.

According to Krashen, gaining fluency in a second language involves both "acquisition" and "learning." Students "acquire" a language by using the language to engage in real communication; they "learn" the language by knowing the rules and having a conscious knowledge about grammar (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). While teaching students about the grammar of a language can promote "learning", students "acquire" a language aurally by speaking it and listening to it in meaningful communicative situations. If the second language to be acquired is written discourse---a discourse whose lexicon, grammar, and rhetoric are learned not through speaking and listening but through reading and writing---the process of

acquisition is visual not aural (Bartholomae, 1980). Regardless of perspective---i. e. whether the language to be acquired is a foreign language or written discourse---students learning the new language need to gain fluency before they should become concerned with the correctness of their utterances (Krashen, 1988). For students learning the language of written discourse, the writing process is a useful model of instruction. Both Fowler (1985) and Collins (1979) point out that when composing written language, BEV speakers need to engage in prewriting activities that help them generate text uninhibitedly without concern for its correctness. Correcting for errors in the text, or "monitoring" to use Krashen & Terrell's (1983) terminology, is best taken care of at a later editing stage in the writing process. Because the text is already transcribed on paper by the editing stage, the writer has time to inspect it, a primary condition for successful monitoring (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Any activity that improves students' monitoring ability will have a positive influence on the correctness of their compositions. Bartholomae (1980) reports that by proofreading their compositions out loud, basic writers can learn to spot and correct dialect features in their writing. Such a simple exercise as proofreading for errors, however, might need to be taught since, according to Bartholomae, students will often read their texts aloud and substitute correct forms in their reading for the incorrect forms on their page without recognizing that such substitutions are being made. Such proofreading---which corrects errors without becoming aware of them---corresponds to a more advanced reading ability than one would expect from basic writers and readers, who usually read by translating each and every syllable phonetically without extracting meaning from the text as higher level readers do (Smith, 1988, 1983, 1982; Bartholomae, 1980). In having students proofread their compositions aloud Bartholomae assumed the students would read phonetically; that is, they would listen to themselves read the errors from their texts, recognize the errors, then stop to correct them.

Ironically, perhaps, to be a good proofreader, students need to regress in their reading development back to a level where they put more emphasis on sounding out syllables phonetically than on reading the text for meaning.

In this study I attempt to determine whether proofreading a text aloud or silently affects a student's ability to edit a text for dialect features. If students are better able to detect the non-standard errors in their texts by reading aloud than by silently proofreading, then proofreading aloud might be the kind of miracle cure that teachers like myself have been waiting for. Miraculous for several reasons: First, it is something that students can do by themselves without the aid of the teacher. While most teachers agree with the theory that students learn best when given individualized instruction, few teach in situations that permit such one-to-one contact. Hence, in English classes with thirty students or more, which are quite common in today's public high schools, any instructional practice that students can do effectively without the teacher's help might seem a bit like a magic. Oral proofreading might also seem miraculous because it is a slight variation of a very common practice in most writing classrooms; i. e., silent proofreading. While silent proofreading might help some students locate and correct some of their errors, it is by no means a miracle treatment. I need only look at many of my students' compositions to see how ineffectively their silent proofreading helps them avoid errors in the final drafts of their compositions. If by simply vocalizing their proofreading, students could effectively correct the errors that eluded them while they proofread silently, then oral proofeading might be that cheap, easy miracle we have been praying for.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether proofreading aloud is more effective than silent proofreading in helping BEV-speaking students to locate and correct BEV features in writing.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-nine 11th grade students from a College Prep English class served as voluntary subjects. They were offered thirty extra credit points for their English grade if they participated in the first round of the study. The subjects were somewhat homogeneous in that they had been tracked into a College Prep English class; however, their stanine scores on the verbal section of the Stanford Achievement Test varied from 2 to 6. All subjects were Black, though not all were American-born: 8 were American Blacks; 4 were second language students who had been in the U. S. less than three years; the remaining 17 were either American-born or American-educated students born of foreign parents. Subjects not born in the U.S. came from Haiti, Bahamas, Jamaica, Martinique, and Honduras. All subjects had BEV in their speech.

Materials

For the first part of this study, three reading selections were used. I composed the three selections, using some of my students' own writing as models for some of the BEV features included in each selection. Each selection contained the same number and same types of dialect errors. For example, all forms contained two non-standard errors using a past participle as an adjective, but each dialect feature did not always occur on the same line for all three forms. Hence, form A had its subject-verb agreement error on line 8, form B's was on line 13, and form C's was on line 10. Rather than have the three forms look like the same template, an attempt was made to make the three selections look like three separate pieces of student writing.

For the second part of the study, the reading selections came from texts the students had composed themselves, excerpts of a 3-6 page informal research paper the students had completed a week earlier for their English class. Students had spent several weeks gathering information and taking notes and another week drafting, editing, and revising the reports. They were encouraged to proofread and get peer feedback on the reports so it might be safe to assume

that the writing in the reports represents the students' best efforts at producing standard written English. The excerpts from the reports were one or two paragraphs long, and the number of BEV features in each excerpt varied from three to seventeen, with a median of six.

Design and Procedure

The first part of the study required all 29 subjects to proofread and correct dialect-related errors in the three teacher-produced texts. During the second part of the study, twelve of the original 29 subjects proofread an excerpt of their own writing both silently and aloud.

The use of teacher-produced texts was a necessary part of this study since it provided the researcher with measures that were uniform and comparable. Unlike typical student texts, the teacher-produced texts were deliberately constructed with thirty of the same kinds of errors, so it was possible to see if a subject was more likely to locate and correct those errors using one proofreading strategy over another. During the first part of the study, subjects were asked to locate and correct any errors in the three different teacher-produced texts. With one text, subjects were told to proofread silently; with another, tc proofread aloud; and with a third, to listen while the teacher read the text aloud. This third condition tested whether the "out loud" condition was effective independent of the visual stimulus.

The order in which students proofread aloud, proofread silently, and listened was varied; the forms of the teacher-produced text (form A, B, or C) were all used with all the proofreading strategies. In other words, some subjects were told to proofread silently first while others listened first and others proofread aloud first. Similarly, some subjects silently proofread form A while others listened to form A and others proofread form A aloud. By varying these two conditions, the researcher could attribute any difference in editing ability to the proofreading strategy employed and not to the order in which the proofreading exercise was performed or to the form of the teacher-produced text being proofread.

For the second part of the study, twelve subjects from the original group of 29 reviewed excerpts from their own writing for errors. They proofread the same excerpt both silently and aloud. The twelve subjects were paired based on their Stanford Achievement Test reading stanines. In order to control for a test-retest effect, one subject from each pair read his or her text aloud first while the other silently proofread first.

Results

Results from the first part of the study indicate that there is little to no difference in students' editing ability when proofreading silently, proofreading aloud, or listening to the teacher proofread.

Insert Table 1 about here

Of the 30 dialect-related errors in each reading selection, subjects proofreading aloud located and corrected an average of 21.4; subjects listening to the teacher proofread located and corrected 22; and subjects proofreading silently located and corrected 22.6. The differences among treatments appear to be too small to be significant.

Results from the second part of the study also seem to support the notion that students are no more likely to find and correct errors in their writing when proofreading aloud than they are while proofreading silently.

Insert Table 2 about here

Of the 77 total errors in the twelve students' writing samples, only sixteen, or about 20%, were corrected. Of those sixteen, twelve were recognized while proofreading silently and nine

were recognized while proofreading aloud. Perhaps more significantly, only seven of the sixteen errors were corrected during the first attempt at proofreading; fourteen were corrected during the second attempt.

Discussion

The promise of proofreading out loud was not upheld by this study. While the mean scores from the first part of the study might indicate that subjects performed relatively the same on the three proofreading tasks, review of individuals' scores shows that 11 of the 29 subjects demonstrated a difference of three or more points between their silent and oral proofreading scores; six students' difference was 5 or more points. The second part of the study is, perhaps, of greater interest to teachers because it is realistic. It involves students scrutinizing their own papers; this is what really happens in a writing class. The first part of the study, on the other hand, is a contrived exercise with questionable potential for transfer to a realistic learning situation. In other words, just because a student is successful locating and correcting dialect-related errors in a text composed by someone else, that student might not be able to locate and correct those same errors when they appear in his or her own writing. Results, in fact, indicate that students performed better on the teacher texts than on their own.

Certain strategies might work better with certain students. In an informal survey of the 29 students tested, twelve felt that they were more effective editors while proofreading silently; seven did not favor one strategy over another; six felt more effective listening to the teacher proofread; and four preferred to read the texts aloud themselves. This suggests that although more students prefer silent proofreading and its mean score was slightly higher than the scores for the other two strategies, some students do better using one strategy while others do better with another.

At first glance, the results from the second part of the study might indicate that basic

writers are not capable of effective editing. The excerpts of students' writing were between one and two paragraphs long. The median number of dialect-related errors per excerpt was six. There were a total of 77 dialect-related errors in all 12 student excerpts. However, the students' excerpted texts represent a fraction of their completed written reports, reports which had been taken through the entire writing process. The errors remained through the first draft stage, the revision stage, the second draft stage, the peer review stage, and the silent proofreading stage. Five of the readers recognized no errors at all in their texts as they were read aloud; five of them corrected one error; and two of them corrected two errors. Proofreading aloud, obviously, was no miracle cure. Teachers of BEV-speaking students are left in the same predicament as before: Our students write intelligently, but rarely do they produce a text that is 100% free from dialect-related errors.

The results from this study reinforce the notion that prescribing editing remedies---or any instructional remedy, for that matter--- en masse to entire classes is not an effective instructional practice. As much as teaching conditions in most high school English classes throughout the country do not allow for much one-on-one interaction between teacher and students, helping students correct the dialect features in their own writing is probably best taken care of on an individualized basis. Both Reynoso (1987) and Bartholomae (1980) point out the need for teachers to individually analyze each basic writer's error patterns and then individually prescribe treatment. While this might seem like a daunting task to the classroom teacher who feels that he or she is already spread too thin among his or her students, the results from the second part of this study might reinforce the importance of individualized instruction.

An encouraging pattern emerges from analysis of the errors in the student-produced texts. The twelve subjects had 77 dialect-related errors in their excerpted texts. Of the 77 errors, 58 of them fall under one of four categories: subject-verb agreement, missing "-s" on

a plural noun, incorrect past participle form of a verb, or incorrect past form of a verb. Furthermore, for almost every occurrence of an error in a student's text, there are almost always at least twice as many instances in the same text where the student uses the incorrect form correctly. The texts of N. and I. might better illustrate these points.

While it might be discouraging to note that N. made five errors in her two paragraph excerpt, individual analysis of her error patterns reveals that all five errors involve a missing "-s" on what should be a plural noun. Further analysis of her text shows that although N. failed to add the "-s" on five separate occasions, on ten other occasions in her two paragraphs, she did use the plural "-s" correctly. I.'s text, also, contains five errors. Analysis of the error pattern reveals four errors with subject-verb agreement and one with a missing "-s" on a plural noun. Further analysis reveals that while I. was able to use the plural "-s" correctly 11 other times in the same one paragraph excerpt, she only was able to make her third person singular subjects agree with their verbs twice. The four times where she erred making her subjects and verbs agree, the word "always" or "also" stood between the subject and the verb. These words were not present in the two sentences where she correctly made the subjects and verbs agree.

Presented with this information, a teacher might take one of several approaches. First, the teacher might heed Bartholomae's (1980) claim that students such as N. and I. do not need to be taught the rules for plural "-s" or subject-verb agreement. They have already demonstrated in their texts that they can apply the rules correctly. Their variable application of the rules, however, probably represents the interference of BEV and its variable grammar rules (Fasold, 1972) with their target language of standard written English.

Linn (1975) points out that when students demonstrate a varying ability to apply a rule of standard written English, there is a possibility for shaping and change. In other words, with

a clarifying explanation of the rule at hand, students might learn to apply it more consistently. This seems particularly true for I.'s problem with subject-verb agreement. If it was brought to her attention, maybe she would pay particular attention to her verbs every time the words "always" and "also" came between them and her subjects. Teaching students more about the rules of a language is what Krashen and Terrell (1983) refer to as language "learning."

While Linn advocates a "learning" approach to deal with students' varying application of the conventions of standard English, Newmark (cited in Krashen, 1988) claims that variable application of a rule represents a low level of "acquisition" of the desired language; in N.'s and I.'s case, standard written English. "Acquisition", as has already been noted, is promoted when students use the language in meaningful communicative situations. When the language to be acquired is standard written English, acquisition is promoted, not aurally, but visually through reading and writing. For this reason, Reynoso (1987), recognizing that most basic writers are non-readers, prescribes that basic, dialect-speaking writers immerse themselves in standard written English.

Fortunately, language-learning and language-acquisition approaches are compatible; both are useful in improving students' use of standard written English. The approach used might very well depend on the unique teaching situation in each individual classroom. The oral proofreading method of editing BEV features out of students' writing, were it effective, would be especially attractive to teachers because students can do it by themselves. Individualized student-teacher interaction was not required. The same might be said for acquisition-related activities. If BEV-speaking students are to gain fluency in standard written English, they need to gain as much practice as possible in using the desired language in real communicative situations. Simply stated, students need to read and write more and more and more. This can easily be prescribed globally to an entire class. Students can be required to read and write on

their own; individualized attention from the teacher is not essential at every step.

It might seem that the same cannot be said for learning-approach activities that ask teachers to provide each student with an individualized error analysis profile. With English teachers facing daily classloads of 130-180 students, this might prove too daunting a task. Analysis of the errors in the student-produced texts in this study, however, might suggest a shortcut for the overburdened teacher. It should be remembered that 58 of the 77 errors in the students' excerpted texts fell into one of four categories. Hence, it might be possible for a teacher to provide individual classes with a "class profile" of their most common errors. The data from this study indicate that many students in the same class often commit the same errors so a teacher-led discussion of problematic areas of subject-verb agreement or verb forms would likely benefit most students in the class.

It should be noted that although no proofreading strategy proved to be a 100% effective method for ridding a text of all its dialect features, proofreading should not be totally abandoned as an editing practice in the writing classroom. Though it might be a fallible practice, it does help some students find and correct some of their errors. The results from the second part of this study might also suggest that students' editing ability improves the more they proofread the same text. Hence, although students found nine errors in their texts while proofreading aloud and only three more while proofreading silently, they found seven the first time they proofread their texts and seven more while they proofread a second time. This perceived improvement in editing ability through repeated proofreading might be an area of interest for future research.

It should be reiterated that there are few, if any, miracle cures in the composition classroom. Most educational treatments require time and practice. Hence, while English teachers of BEV-speaking students might continue to hope for quick and effective ways to help students write compositions free from BEV influences, we might be wise to remember how long

it takes a student to acquire a foreign language and speak it as flawlessly and fluently as a native. With this in mind, we might also heed the words of Reynoso (1987, p. 10):

> Go easy on yourself. Don't expect miracles. Don't expect students to reverse the linguistic habits of a lifetime in ten weeks. . . . If the students in your classes have discovered pleasure in reading and fascination with language, then in my view you have accomplished much.

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Table 1

Mean Number of Thirty Errors Corrected in Teacher-Produced Texts as a Function of Proofreading Strategy

	Proofreading Strategy		
	Proofreading Aloud	Listening	Proofreading Silently
Errors corrected			
M	21.4	22.0	22.6
SD	5.2	4.5	4.6

Table 2

Number of Errors Corrected in Student-Produced Texts as a Function of Proofreading Strategy

Subject	Stanine	Errors Corrected Silently	Errors Corrected Orally	Errors Corrected Total	Results from First Part of Study Silent	Listen	Oral
G.	6	0/4	0/4	0/4	21	23	22.5
F.	6	2/4	1/4	2/4	23	23.5	24.5
N.1	5	1/6	2/6	2/6	21	22	27
J.1	5	0/3	0/3	0/3	19.5	16.5	21.5
M.	-	1/6	1/6	2/6	24.5	20.5	20
E.	5	0/6	0/6	0/6	20	16	19
N.2	4	2/5	2/5	2/5	22	22	19.5
D.	4	1/3	0/3	1/3	20	22	23
J.2	4	0/7	1/7	1/7	20.5	21	19
I.	3	3/5	0/5	3/5	21	22.5	20
T.1	2	1/17	1/17	1/17	12.5	6.5	11
T.2	3	1/11	1/11	2/11	22	15.5	17
Totals:		12/77	9/77	16/77			

- = No stanine available ____=Strategy employed 1st .5=Error found, not corrected

After first proofreading exercise: 7/77

After second proofreading exercise: 14/77